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Bush categorically defends covert CIA activities

by TOM DRURY
Staff Writer

Former CIA director and potential presidential candidate George Bush firmly endorsed covert actions of the CIA despite severe criticisms made by students at a UI public lecture Thursday.

"The only way to protect this country is to have the best counter-intelligence in the world," said Bush, who was in Iowa City campaigning for Republican 1st District Congressman Jim Leach.

Also appearing at a morning press conference, Bush advocated a stronger

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U.S. defense, opposing withdrawal of U.S. troops from Korea, and calling for production of the neutron bomb.

"We're living in a tough and imperfect world," said the oil millionaire, who is considered a dark-horse possibility for the 1980 Republican presidential nomination.

A former envoy to China and former ambassador to the United States, Bush talked to a mostly-student crowd of about 100, withstanding a number of charges, most of them centering around allegations of CIA involvement with the Shah of Iran's government.

In an appearance that ended with one student claiming that U.S. armaments were used to kill 10,000 Iranians, Bush stuck to his assertion that maintaining a good relationship with the Shah is a U.S. priority, "transcending anything."

Though he said the CIA had committed some illegalities — specifically the opening of U.S. citizens' mail — Bush admitted to no mistakes in CIA involvement in foreign countries.

"I'm not apologetic for foreign policy initiatives the United States takes," Bush

said, adding that those who blame the CIA for the majority of international problems are not looking at the whole picture.

"It's the easy way out to say that all evil comes from one agency out of control," Bush said, after several Iranian students charged that the CIA was responsible for military coups in Iran and Chile.

Bush responded that the Senate committee investigating past CIA actions had determined the agency was not responsible for the downfall of the Marxist government of former Chilean president Salvador Allende, but he indicated that CIA involvement in governmental overthrow may be justifiable — particularly if a government is in the process of "aborting every vestige of democracy" in a country.

Bush asked the crowd if American internal opposition to Hitler's government would have been "right," had it been known that Hitler would instigate the massive slaughter of Jews.

To those who expressed opposition to CIA efforts to undermine leftist governments, such as the Bay of Pigs attempt to overthrow Fidel Castro's Cuban government, Bush argued that leftist "liberation fronts" in Africa are also attempting to overthrow existing governments.

"You're on both sides," Bush told a representative of the Revolutionary Student Brigade. "I find myself consistent, maybe not right."

He said Iranian protesters and others should focus attention on other injustices.

When Afghanistan went through a Communist-inspired takeover, he

asked, "where were you guys with your masks then?"

Bush said protesters should be urging the United States to speak out against the "genocide of Cambodia," where he said "mothers are hacking their own cousins' heads off."

"Why aren't you picketing the United Nations like I was picketing on human rights?" he asked. Bush was the U.S. United Nations Ambassador in 1971-1972.

Bush said, "I almost fell over in a dead shock" when he heard of Sen. George McGovern's suggestion that the UN consider sending a military force to Cambodia, but he said the plan does not have a "snowball's chance" of changing the situation in Cambodia, where the government has reportedly murdered millions of citizens.

"The UN doesn't work that way and he knows it doesn't," Bush said.

Though he said he would like to see a UN sanction of Cambodia, Bush said the "one way" the Cambodian situation might change is if the People's Republic of China would use its influence to stop the killing. But he said U.S. influence with China probably could not bring about such an action.

"We have no IOU's out there that would make China do what we want," Bush said, though he said the post-"Gang of Four" Chinese government was more open to improving relations with the West than the previous governments.

Though optimistic about improving relations with mainland China, Bush was critical of Carter's foreign policy. Like other Republicans, including Leach, Bush said the administration could not present a unified front in dealing with other countries, particularly the Soviet Union.

Bush gave a strong endorsement to freshman Congressman Leach, whom he said was rated highly in Washington Republican leadership circles.